



172nd Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America

Honolulu, Hawaii

28 November – 2 December 2016

Speech communication: Paper 5aSC37

Focus perception in Japanese: Effects of focus location and accent condition

Albert Lee

*Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, Chinese University of Hong Kong and
Department of Linguistics, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; albertlee@hku.hk*

Faith Chiu and Yi Xu

Department of Speech, Hearing and Phonetic Sciences, London; faith.chiu.11@ucl.ac.uk, yi.xu@ucl.ac.uk

This study explores the contexts in which native Japanese listeners have difficulty identifying prosodic focus. Theories of intonational phonology, syntax, and phonetics make different predictions as to which focus location would be the most challenging to the native listener. Lexical pitch accent further complicates this picture. In a sentence with mixed pitch accent conditions (e.g. U-A-U), the lexical accent would naturally stand out as more prominent than the unaccented words (U) in terms of modifications to the F0 contour, thus potentially resembling focus. A focus identification task was conducted with 16 native listeners from the Greater Tokyo area. Natural and synthetic stimuli were played to the listeners who then chose which word of the sentence was under focus. Neutral focus (or no focus) was also an option. Stimuli contrasted in accent condition and focus location. Results showed a highly complex interplay between these two factors. For example, accented narrow foci were always more correctly identified (51%) than unaccented ones (28%), whereas the identification rate for final focus was the lowest (31%) among all focus locations. These results are discussed with reference to the research literature on focus production and formal representation of intonation.

